

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**CLASH OF STRATEGIES: PAX AMERICANA  
AND THE NUCLEAR AMBITIONS OF NORTH KOREA**

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## ABSTRACT

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America currently finds itself in a precarious position as it grapples with developing the right strategy for dealing with the current crisis in North Korea. For nearly 50 years the US has negotiated with North Korea in an effort to maintain stability on the Korean Peninsula, nudge North Korea into the fold of democracy, and, one day, achieve Korean unity. The net result of a half-century's worth of US appeasement reveals that North Korea is in better shape now than it was at the end of the Korean War. North Korea has progressed from being a regional menace to a genuine nuclear weapons power that may threaten the security of the US homeland. How is it possible for one of the world's greatest powers to be on the "horns of a dilemma," strategically, by an economically failed rogue state? What actions should the US take to protect its interests and preserve peace? This paper will discuss key issues that serve as stumbling blocks to long term peace and stability in Korea and recommend a strategic course of action to achieve US goals.



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## CLASH OF STRATEGIES: PAX AMERICANA AND THE NUCLEAR AMBITIONS OF NORTH KOREA

There is a world of difference between a hated dictator and a hated dictator with nukes.

—Vice Admiral Arthur Cebrowski USN (Ret)

America is currently in a precarious position as it grapples with developing the right strategy for resolving the current crisis with North Korea (NK). For nearly 50 years the United States (US) has negotiated with NK in an effort to maintain stability on the Korean peninsula, nudge NK into the fold of democracy, and, one day, achieve Korean unity. The net result of a half-century's worth of US appeasement reveals that NK is in better shape now than it was at the end of the Korean War. North Korea has progressed from being a regional menace to a genuine nuclear weapons power that may threaten the security of the US homeland.

Failure to "denuclearize" NK and achieve long-term stability poses real danger to the US, her interests, and the interests of her regional Asian allies. A miscalculation resulting in a nuclear detonation on the Korean peninsula or in the American homeland would have unimaginable consequences – at best, an economic and humanitarian catastrophe – at worst, a death spiral into World War III and global nuclear weapons exchange.

Herein lies the dilemma for the US—to strike at the North Koreans now, and risk war on our terms; or wait and attempt to apply increasing pressure to contain and wear them down in order to develop long term stability, and risk war, on their terms.

How is it possible for one of the world's greatest powers to be put on the "horns of a dilemma," strategically, by an economically failed rogue state?<sup>1</sup> What actions should the US take to protect its interests and preserve peace?

The solution is not more of the same, nor is it a new strategy based on a preemptive strike. The solution requires a strategic plan that clearly communicates US intentions and resolve to put NK on a path all parties can accept. It requires a plan based on a historical analysis of how the North Koreans have continually out maneuvered the US at the negotiating table and an understanding of their goals, strengths, and weakness. It requires a strategy of balanced coercion.

### NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR WEAPONS PROGRAMS AND THE AGREED FRAMEWORK

Since the 1960s, NK steadily pursued a nuclear capability, though they steadfastly denied possession of a nuclear weapons program until October 2003.<sup>2</sup> At various times in the last 40 years, Russia, East Germany, and China have supported NK with technical and material

assistance to their nuclear program—allegedly for energy vice weaponry—but cut them off when they realized it was either no longer in their interest to support or trust the North Koreans.<sup>3</sup> As a response to growing international concerns the USSR successfully pressured NK into signing the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1985.<sup>4</sup>

After nearly four decades of numerous crises, and little diplomatic progress, the signing of the Agreed Framework in October 1994 seemed to point to a new dawn in US and North Korean relations.<sup>5</sup> The intent of the Agreed Framework was to create conditions for normalized relations between the US and NK, bring about a “resumption of North-South dialogue between Pyongyang and Seoul,” and eliminate ‘s nuclear weapons program and its potential to export nuclear technology to third parties.<sup>6</sup>

Despite all the fanfare generated by the Agreed Framework, it collapsed when NK pulled out on 8 May 1998.<sup>7</sup>

### **THE CALM BEFORE THE STORM: MORE NUCLEAR REVELATIONS**

Even with the demise of hope contained within the pages of the Agreed Framework, a series of sweeping North Korean initiated positive events occurred in the summer of 2002. These initiatives included high level diplomatic meetings both in the US and in Pyongyang; agreements to reestablish rail and road links between the two nations; demining sections of the DMZ; sending NK athletes to the Asian Games in Pusan, South Korea, and ‘s stunning admission they had kidnapped Japanese nationals from Japan in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>8</sup>

Then, in October 2002, the US was shocked when NK announced it was in the process of building a highly enriched uranium (HEU) nuclear weapons program and intended to “restart its frozen plutonium-based nuclear program at Yongbyon”—including reprocessing spent reactor fuel rods stored at the facility. These actions would provide NK with plutonium for nuclear weapons.<sup>9</sup> Adding more fuel to the fire are recent intelligence reports that K has already produced enough weapons grade plutonium to make half a dozen nuclear weapons.<sup>10</sup> Finally, in January 2003, NK withdrew from the NPT causing significant international concern.<sup>11</sup>

Of great concern to the US and the Asian regional players, is that in two meetings of the six party talks focused on resolving the danger, there has been no substantial progress.<sup>12</sup> The reason for this failure seems to be NK’s view that nuclear weapons are its “only valuable national asset...” and so far, they have not seen a good reason to relinquish them.<sup>13</sup> Although there have been offers to provide some assistance to NK, the Bush administration refuses to provide whatever it is that NK is demanding. For the US to give in would be to yield to nuclear blackmail.<sup>14</sup>

However, the single most significant event to change the face of the strategic landscape in NK occurred in April 2003 when the North Korean delegation made it known they would not be above assisting a third party with developing a nuclear weapons capability.<sup>15</sup> This stunning announcement flew in the face of US policy “to stop rogue states and their terrorist clients before they are able to threaten or use weapons of mass destruction against the US and our allies and friends.”<sup>16</sup>

#### **US GOALS AND INTERESTS—WHAT ARE VITAL, IMPORTANT, AND PERIPHERAL<sup>17</sup>**

There are numerous enduring US interests that have application to Asia in general and Korea specifically which guide US policy makers and strategists. They are the security of the US homeland and its territories; security and well being of allies and friends, to include the East Asian littoral; peace and stability in the Western Hemisphere; and global economic stability and prosperity.<sup>18</sup>

These US interests juxtaposed NK’s ability to affect them clearly creates a high-stakes strategic environment and cause these threats to be a priority for resolution by the US. My analysis of specific US goals in Korea is depicted in Figure 1.

OBJECTIVE	VITAL	IMPORTANT	PERIPHERAL
Protect US Homeland <sup>19</sup>	•		
Denuclearize the Korean Peninsula <sup>20</sup>	•		
Achieve Long-term Stability/Prosperity <sup>21</sup>		•	
Create “Soft Landing” for North Korea Regime Collapse <sup>22</sup>		•	
Reunify Korea Under Democracy <sup>23</sup>			•

TABLE 1. US STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES IN NORTH KOREA

#### **NORTH KOREAN GOALS AND INTERESTS**

North Korea has several goals as depicted in Figure 2.<sup>24</sup> The regime cares for the needs and survival of its people only to the degree it ensures the survival of the regime itself.<sup>25</sup> Everything it does is about self-protection of the regime.

OBJECTIVE	VITAL	IMPORTANT	PERIPHERAL
Regime Survival <sup>26</sup>	•		
Communist Reunification of Korea <sup>27</sup>			•
Withdrawal of US Forces From the Korean Peninsula <sup>28</sup>			•
Nuclear Weapons Capability <sup>29</sup>	•		

TABLE 2. NORTH KOREA'S STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

### NORTH KOREA AS A RATIONAL ACTOR

One of the first topics that comes up in a conversation about NK is the difficulty in dealing with an actor that is not rational. North Korea is commonly viewed as “crazy,’ ‘irrational,’ ‘erratic,’ and ‘bizarre.’”<sup>30</sup> However, one man’s irrational behavior might be perfectly rational for another. Witness that after more than 50 years of existence, NK has survived a major war with the US and the United Nations (UN); near extinction of Stalinist based communism via the end of the Cold War; the loss of significant material and financial support from Russia and China; near starvation conditions in the 1990s, the death of its dictator who led the country for almost 50 years, and countless collisions with the West, usually diplomatic, but, sometimes physical. In fact, Chuck Downs argues convincingly that NK is in better shape today than it was at the end of the Korean War.

At the close of the Korean War, North Korea was worse off than it is today. It was recognized only by its ideological sponsors, condemned by the international community for instigating a war, and devastated as a result of its own aggression. Today, North Korea has obtained political recognition, security assurances, and significant economic assistance from its former enemies. Its negotiating strategy has brought the regime back from the point of collapse time and again during the intervening years.<sup>31</sup>

The point is that to label NK as “irrational” is to fail to recognize their success. A closer look at the North Korean negotiating strategy reveals anything but irrational behavior: unorthodox maybe—irrational, no.

### NORTH KOREAN NEGOTIATING STRATEGY

The US has historically underestimated NK’s mastery of high stakes negotiations to gain concessions from the US. In his book, *Over the Line: North Korea’s Negotiating Strategy*, Chuck Downs provides an in-depth understanding of NK’s negotiating techniques and how the US has consistently been out maneuvered at the negotiating table. His research indicates that NK has successfully used Machiavellian tactics to repeatedly take advantage of US negotiating naiveté and its preoccupation with “self-imposed requirements for maintaining the moral high

ground.”<sup>32</sup> The US’s view that compromise is an essential component of negotiations puts it at a severe disadvantage when dealing with NK. Downs says it perfectly: “North Korea has a different view: negotiation is war by other means.”<sup>33</sup> The end result: the US has been duped over-and-over again. If the stakes weren’t so high, it would be laughable—akin to Charlie Brown’s eternal belief that Lucy will finally hold the football still so he can kick it, despite her perfect record of jerking the ball away at the last possible moment. Make no mistake, NK’s understanding of the West’s weaknesses and fears make its negotiating strategy the bedrock of its strategic success.

A myth that needs to be dispelled is that North Korean negotiating strategy is a matter of culture—it is not—it is a tactic.<sup>34</sup> North Korean negotiating techniques include actions beyond the pale of acceptable international diplomatic behavior and utterly foreign to Western negotiators. Their rude and abrasive behavior is clearly designed to intimidate and rattle opponents.<sup>35</sup> Downs’ excellent summary of NK’s negotiation strategy follows:

North Korea initiates negotiations by appearing to be open to fundamental changes in its policies, uses its willingness to participate to demand benefits and concessions, and terminates discussions when it has gained maximum advantage. It manages negotiations so that its adversaries experience stages of optimism, disillusionment, and disappointment. Adversaries’ disappointment, in turn, paves the way for creating an illusion of fresh cooperation in the initial stage of the next negotiation. Whatever talks are under way when the reader considers these words, one of these cyclic stages will apply. And whatever state applies will be replaced as the negotiating process proceeds. The cycle can be expected to continue as long as the current regime holds power.<sup>36</sup>

Just one of the many negotiating examples that bears out the above-described cycle is reflected in the crisis over NK’s building of nuclear reactors in the early 1990’s. In this example, NK allowed the West to get just enough information about steps it was taking to build a nuclear weapons facility, to cause alarm, all the while denying the very thing they wanted the US to conclude. The major crisis they intentionally created necessitated the West seek to negotiate to resolve the situation.<sup>37</sup> North Korea knew the US would defeat them if war were to ensue, but they confidently based on their brinkmanship strategy to cause the US to do almost anything to avoid war. They knew us better than we knew them.

North Korea’s strategy paid off. Instead of being taken to task for violations of the NPT, Kim IL Sung gained significant concessions culminating with the signing of the Agreed Framework in late 1994. They had skillfully incorporated Western fears of NK’s “irrational” behavior and “recklessness.”<sup>38</sup> This is brinkmanship strategy of the highest order.

Leap forward to October 2002 and once again NK has let it be known that it has a nuclear weapons program. This time their weapons program is based on a highly enriched uranium

extraction capability, a clear violation of numerous previous agreements. The cycle Downs described above is in motion once again. The history books are full of examples of North Korean negotiating success based on the same strategy or generating a crisis to gain concessions.

The US must recognize that its reluctance to apply its great strength in its dealing with NK only undermines its ability to achieve success. According to Chuck Downs, "the genuine alternative to war with North Korea is now, and always has been, credible deterrence. North Korea will not consciously incite a regime-terminating war any more than it will pursue regime-threatening reforms. In every instance when Western resolve was credible, North Korea retreated."<sup>39</sup> Deployment of combat aircraft to the Far East and the deployment of a carrier battle group to Korean waters in response to the Panmunjom axe murders in August 1976 are a good example of eliciting North Korean cooperation despite their rhetoric.<sup>40</sup> In regard to US negotiating failures, Downs states, "In every negotiation, the West holds tactical and strategic leverage it will not employ."<sup>41</sup> However, "When negotiators have been able to hold firm and back up their words with military action, North Korea has always yielded."<sup>42</sup> And finally, Admiral Turner Joy, one of the most experienced US negotiators to deal with the North Koreas, observed,

It is only through the imminent threat of application of our military power that the [North Koreans] can be compelled to negotiate seriously for the alleviation of the basic issues between their world and ours.... When the [North Koreans] believe that failure to resolve issues with the Western world will engage a serious and immediate risk to their present empire, they will then, and only then, seek to resolve those issues. They will not be bluffed, however. Successful negotiation with the [North Koreans] will ensue when the United States poses employment of its tremendous military power as the *actual* alternative. We must be prepared to carry through that threat or it cannot succeed in its peaceful purpose. We must accept whatever risk of world war may attend such a procedure, knowing that should the Communist world choose war, war was coming in any event.<sup>43</sup>

#### **NORTH KOREAN CENTER OF GRAVITY AND CRITICAL VULNERABILITY ASSESSMENT**

In the end the US will only achieve its goals in Korea when it compels NK to submit to its will. In order for the US to accomplish its goals it must determine what the North Korean Center(s) of gravity are and then determine how to defeat them without a conventional attrition fight.

One of the most effective ways to defeat a center of gravity is to determine the capabilities that "[enable] a center of gravity to function as such" and then, in turn, determine what the critical requirements are that provide the "essential conditions, resources and means for a

critical capability to be fully operative.”<sup>44</sup> Finally, those critical requirements that can be attacked are then designated critical vulnerabilities and a strategy is developed that applies the elements of national power against the critical vulnerabilities to cause the center of gravity to collapse.<sup>45</sup>

My analysis reveals that NK has two strategic centers of gravity: the first is Kim Jung Il and the second is NK’s nuclear weapons capability. An explanation of how I arrived at these two centers of gravity is provided in the endnotes.<sup>46</sup> The chart below reflects my assessment of the North Korean centers of gravity-critical capabilities-critical requirements-critical vulnerabilities relationship.

CRITICAL CAPABILITY	CRITICAL REQUIREMENT	CRITICAL VULNERABILITY
• Remain alive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resources to be protected from internal and external threats</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Large responsive military</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CV-1: A large antiquated military subject to defeat by a superior/modern US/ROK military</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reliance on China to keep US from undermining NK</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CV-2: Reliance on China is built upon cold war paradigm that globalization makes vulnerable</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Political Support from China and Russia to keep US in check</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CV-3: Same as CV-2</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Division among US and its allies</li> </ul>	
• Stay informed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resources and means to receive essential intelligence</li> </ul>	
• Govern	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resources and means to communicate with government officials, military leaders, national elites and the people</li> </ul>	
• Remain influential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determination to preserve a COA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CV-4: Determination to preserve COA is vulnerable to a change in US negotiating strategy</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brinkmanship negotiating skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CV-5: Brinkmanship negotiating skills are dependent upon the resolve of the US</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued support of the people and other powerful government and military leaders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CV-6: Critical support by elites can be targeted</li> </ul>

TABLE 3. CENTER OF GRAVITY (1): KIM JUNG IL

CRITICAL CAPABILITIES	CRITICAL REQUIREMENTS	CRITICAL VULNERABILITIES
• Means of delivery	• IBM infrastructure to include technical expertise, the missile, guidance systems, fueling, launch capabilities, and targeting systems	
• Weapons grade plutonium	• Technical expertise, equipment, and facilities to extract plutonium	• CV-1: Pursuit or possession of technical expertise, equip, and facilities can be made grounds for destruction of regime
	• Conviction that there is no viable alternative to ensure regime survival than to develop nuclear weapons	• CV-2: Kim's conviction there is no other COA can be challenged by providing him a viable alternative
• Will to employ nuclear weapons	• Belief there can be some gain in employing WMD, i.e. US will do something less than destroy NK and his regime	• CV-3: Belief there is gain to be achieved by WMD employment can be discredited by convincing US position of assured regime destruction

TABLE 4. CENTER OF GRAVITY (2): POSSESSION OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS

The above center of gravity analysis reflects at least six critical vulnerabilities for Center of Gravity (1) and two critical vulnerabilities for Center of Gravity (2) that can be targeted by a well-orchestrated US strategy. Additional details on targeting North Korean centers of gravity are discussed later in the paper.

#### COURSES OF ACTION

The key to developing a workable strategy is to understand the opponent. First, the US must nail down the linkages between NK's strategic objectives, its centers of gravity, and its related critical vulnerabilities; second, the strategy must focus all the elements of national power on NK's critical vulnerabilities so that enough pressure is applied on their centers of gravity that the regime bends to the will of the US. I have determined there are three basic strategic course of action (COA) for dealing with NK: one, status quo; two, preemptive strike; and three, balanced coercion.<sup>47</sup>

#### COA-1: STATUS QUO

A COA available to the US is to maintain the status quo—that is, to continue to isolate and contain NK and deal with the issues as they arise. It can be argued that despite how one feels

about the US's seeming inability to keep NK from achieving considerable success at gaining attention for its issues, NK continues to be a rogue state diplomatically and a failed state economically. Additionally, it has yet "to achieve its stated long-term goals—revolution in the South, reunification of the peninsula under socialism, and withdrawal of foreign forces...."<sup>48</sup> On the surface this seems to be a safe, conservative, and logical course of action for all the major state players involved with North Korean issues because it contains no radical departures from what "the players" expect the US to do—no surprises, if you will. The more consistent the US's actions, the less likely its intent will be misinterpreted which reduces the likelihood of triggering an unintended incident that sets off a series of unanticipated consequences that spiral down into a catastrophic event.

The problem with the status quo COA is the strategic situation has changed dramatically in the last half decade. North Korea's pursuit, and likely possession, of nuclear weapons when combined with what amounts to the demonstrated capability of an intercontinental ballistic missile capability (ICBM) raises the stakes to unprecedented levels. Additionally, it is "estimated that North Korea possessed 2,500 to 5,000 tons of poisonous chemicals and [has] the capacity to produce a large number of biological weapons."<sup>49</sup> This combined capability truly transforms the threat in NK from one of regional security to one of US homeland security. It is not enough to think that NK is unlikely to attack the US; the fact of the matter is they will soon have the capability to pursue that option. Furthermore, their past record of selling missile technology to third parties and their recent pronouncement they might be willing to sell nuclear technology to a "third party" plays right into America's worst fear—terrorist detonation of a nuclear device in a US city. The US simply cannot afford to continue to surrender the initiative to NK, which has proven to be unpredictable, strategically adroit, and able to disprove all those who believe that, like the USSR, its collapse is inevitable.<sup>50</sup>

#### COA 2: PREEMPTION

One can argue that just as Saddam Hussein continually violated Iraqi agreements with the international community, NK has done no less, and probably more.

The Bush administration's new strategy of preemptive defense, as spelled out in the *National Security Strategy*, clearly indicates a willingness to attack preemptively to counter threats to US security. It was for this very reason the US led the "coalition of the willing" to attack Iraq and remove the regime of Saddam Hussein in the spring of 2003. With the North Korean statement they might be willing to sell nuclear weapons technology to a third party, their

threat as a member of the "Axis of Evil" far exceeds any capacity for evil possessed by the regime of Saddam Hussein.

The effect on the world of a nuclear detonation in a major US city is unimaginable. To a degree, even two years after the loss of the World Trade Center Towers, and the death of nearly 3,000 people, the US remains in a state of semi-shock. If the world has not changed because of the attack, the willingness of the US to act militarily, with or without UN support, has, and in an unprecedented manner. Because of the attacks of 11 September, the US has used military force to effect regime change in not one but two countries in the Middle East and done so in less than 24 months.

We now face, in NK, a nation with a more able military than Iraq, a known nuclear based weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program, and the will to assist a third party in gaining a nuclear weapons capability. One would be hard pressed to create a better scenario to justify a preemptive attack. Given all we know about NK today, imagine the public and world outcry if the regime directed the detonation of a nuclear weapon in the US or provided assistance to a terrorist organization who detonated a nuclear weapon in the US, and we did not act preemptively.

The problem with a preemptive strike, however, is that to be effective the US would have to destroy all the nuclear weapons possessed by NK or face a retaliatory nuclear strike. Whether or not a post-attacked NK could pull off a nuclear weapons detonation on the US homeland is impossible to determine. To be sure, the risk of a nuclear weapon being used against Seoul and/or US military forces in Korea as a response to a US attack would have to be considered as possible, if not probable. Of course, if it comes down to trading a nuclear catastrophe in Korea or in the US heartland, most Americans, if given the choice, would demand it take place in Korea. Regardless of the strategy the US develops and applies to NK, if we get it wrong and NK conducts a nuclear first strike against the US, a preemptive US strike may suddenly seem like a missed opportunity. But we are not there yet.

### COA 3: BALANCED COERCION

COA 3 is based on recognition of NK's priority of regime survival, its negotiating strategy, and the changing regional security and political situation.

First, the US must not allow a third party to gain access to a WMD provided by NK. This must not be negotiable. The US is on the threshold of facing this threat.

Second, the US must recognize, based on an historical analysis, that the North Korean regime's first objective is its own survival—that means that it is not suicidal and will respond to opportunities to survive when faced with certain destruction.

Third, in order to convince the regime that they can in fact survive, the US must allow a place for them in the international community, for now. This is the one part of the strategy that the US simply must take a longer view on achieving.<sup>51</sup> The US's first goal must be homeland security, followed by regional security, followed by a democratic Korean peninsula. In order to make the offer of regime survival a plausible alternative, the US must be willing to allow a communist regime to survive, otherwise there is no incentive for the regime to give up its nuclear weapons capability.

Fourth, the US must recognize that the only time the North Koreans have backed down and complied with US desires is when credible military threat was applied to the regime.<sup>52</sup> The US must make it clear to the North Koreans they will be destroyed if they do not comply. They must also be made to believe that the US is prepared to fight in a nuclear environment to achieve that goal. If the US is not prepared to go that far, then there is no credible way to prevent the North Koreans from further developing their nuclear ICBM capability or selling nuclear technologies/weapons to a third party. In other words, if the US is not prepared to fight them on their own soil now, then it will simply have no leverage to stop North Korean development of a nuclear weapons capability, which will one day be able to strike the US homeland or be marketed to a “third party” terrorist group. The North Koreans must believe the US is a credible threat to their survival and time has run out.<sup>53</sup>

Last, the US will have to provide incentive “carrots” to NK as it works its way along the US demanded path. It may sound like appeasement, but the reality is it acknowledges the human element of “what is in it for me” that drives many of the decisions made by the human species. This part of the strategy requires the skillful use of all the elements of national power in a manner to reward good behavior and punish bad behavior. The US must provide the right kind of incentives, at the right time, to elicit the desired action from the regime. However, at anytime the regime stumbles, the US must not delay adjusting the application of the elements of national power. The US must immediately coerce the regime back onto the agreed path and the form of coercion most likely required is the only kind they understand—military power aimed directly at the survival of the regime.<sup>54</sup>

### **Defeating the North Korean Centers of Gravity.**

The following is my analysis of how the elements of national power can be applied against the critical vulnerabilities identified in Figures (3) and (4).

- **CG (1) Kim Jung Il as a Center of Gravity:**

- o CV-1: Large responsive military.
  - Element of National Power: Military
  - Strategy: North Korea has a large Army but it contains antiquated equipment and lacks combat experience.<sup>55</sup> The Republic of Korea (ROK) military, let alone combined ROK/US forces, would likely defeat it. The US should leverage its military power and its preemptive action in Iraq to sew seeds of certainty in the minds of the North Korean regime that; one, they are next if they don't comply with US demands; and two, their military will be soundly defeated. The US must be prepared to act preemptively in NK if they do not respond to US demands to denuclearize.<sup>56</sup>
- o CV-2/3: Reliance on China/Russia to keep US from undermining NK.
  - Element of National Power: Diplomatic, Economic, and Information.
  - Strategy: The US should provide economic and political incentives to China/Russia for demanding NK disarm its nuclear capability and support expanded Chinese/Russian trade goals. The US should depict China/Russian efforts to denuclearize NK as a further example of their increasing international roles in assisting with world security and stability. The US should explore the feasibility of combined US/Chinese/Russian military exercises to demonstrate US/Chinese/Russian resolve. The US should also gain UN sanctions against NK. The US should also leverage Russia's past experience in nuclear disarmament and inspection/verification programs to undermine 's concerns of inspection intrusiveness on internal state security.<sup>57</sup>
- o CV-4: Kim Jung Il's will/determination to pursue a specific COA contrary to US desires.<sup>58</sup>
  - Elements of National Power: Diplomatic, Information, and Military.
  - Strategy: The US should change its negotiating strategy. The US must recognize the absolute requirement to inject credible military

- action if the North Korean Regime does not meet demands of the US. The US should develop a system of rewards to acknowledge the human element and insist that necessary means to verify every step of the agreements are implemented. This strategy undermines the Regime's will to pursue a COA contrary to US desires by ensuring the communication of a credible threat to its survival.
- o CV-5: Kim Jung Il's brinkmanship negotiating strategy.
    - Elements of National Power: Diplomatic, Information, Military.
    - Strategy: With resolve and confidence, this is probably the easiest CV to exploit. It provides the biggest lever to achieve US goals. The US must eliminate its strategy based on achieving concessions through compromise to one that recognizes 's view of negotiations as war by other means. The US must gain control of the negotiation process and maintain the initiative. Time is on the side of NK, not the US.<sup>59</sup>
  - o CV-6: The regime stays in power due to support of key government and military leaders.
    - Elements of National Power: Information, diplomatic, economic, military.
    - Strategy: Essential to alleviating Kim Jung Il's fear of regime collapse is for the US to not be seen as taking action to undermine the support of the government/military leaders the regime must have to survive. The US must be willing to allow the regime to survive if its negotiating efforts are to have credibility. Attacking this CV must be done over a long period of time and appear to be the result of natural friction and pressure generated by a communist state's oppressed people in continual contact with a free people who live in a democratic society. This is the one strategy where the US must take the "longer breath."
- **CG (2) Possession of Nuclear Weapons:**
    - o CV-1, 2, and 3: Regime believes that there is no credible alternative to the possession or employment of nuclear weapons to ensure regime's survival.
      - Elements of National Power: Information, Diplomatic, Military, and Economic.

- Strategy: The US should recognize the legitimate nature of the regimes position based on the human desire to survive. The US should enter into an agreement with Russia and China to “guarantee the security and stability of the entire Korean Peninsula.”<sup>60</sup> This action provides the regime with a COA that undermines the regime’s conviction that a nuclear weapons program/capability is the way to ensure its survival. This strategy requires the US to accept the communist nature of the regime for the time being. In response, NK must eliminate all WMD/nuclear capabilities and HEU and plutonium programs verified by “intrusive, immediate, and continuous inspections by [International Atomic Energy Agency] IAEA.”<sup>61</sup> They must also cease building and testing long-range missiles that can serve as a delivery means for nuclear weapons.<sup>62</sup> The US must be willing to incorporate a credible threat of military action, unilateral if necessary, in response to any attempt to slow or interfere with inspections or fail to comply with previous agreements. The imminent destruction of the regime must be made a credible threat should NK not strictly adhere to the conditions to eliminate its nuclear weapons program. Economic aid to alleviate the starvation of the people and attendant strangulation of the state/collapse of the regime must be provided. If the regime collapses as a result of US diplomatic/economic policies, then NK may use nuclear weapons to gain concessions to ensure survival. Thus, the US must provide economic incentives to “ratchet” back the pressure as long as the regime responds to US demands.

#### **Dangling Carrots—and a Sledgehammer.**

James Laney, former ambassador to South Korea, and Jason Shaplen have proposed a phased incentive program that is logical and based on years of experience in dealing with NK. The essence of their proposal follows:<sup>63</sup>

- **Phase 1**
  - The US, Russia, and China guarantee NK's external security.

- **Phase 2**

- North Korea eliminates WMD, nuclear, and missile programs as reflected in the CV-1 and 2 discussion above.
- North Korea reduces conventional forces along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).
- North Korea implements market/economic reforms. This requirement is part of the information strategy for painting a picture of a regime trying to recover and enter into the international community and it improves NK's economic condition.
- North Korea and Japan normalize relations and Japan provides war reparations to NK, via aid, over a number of years.
- Once the nuclear program is declared eliminated by the IAEA, the US signs a non-aggression treaty with NK and the two Koreas enter into a Korean Federation.
- The US gradually lifts economic sanctions.
- Further concessions include financial assistance with an electric power generation capability—probably coal fired vice light water reactor (LWR) (I disagree with Laney and Shaplan's view the US should provide a LWR)—economic aid from China and Russia via investments in NK.
- Finally, a regional security forum should be signed between the US, Russia, China, Japan, South Korea, and NK.

With the successful implementation of the above strategy, the North Korean goal of regime survival will have been met. All the US goals have been met with the exception of a democratic Korean peninsula. Time and the positive influence of democracy will have to work their magic to bring about NK's transition to democracy, supported by a consistent and firm US resolve to communicate its will to act militarily should NK not abide by its agreement to denuclearize. All of these actions support an eventual "soft" vice "hard" landing when the North Korean regime eventually succumbs to a peaceful transition to democracy.

#### **A FINAL COMMENT**

North Korea represents the most significant threat to US security and interests in the world today. North Korea's likely possession of nuclear weapons and its recently developed ICBM capability put the safety of the US homeland at risk. North Korea's record of selling

missile technology to third parties and its recent pronouncement that it may be willing to sell nuclear technology to a third party, represents America's greatest fear. It is a threat the US must not ignore. However, neither a knee jerk reaction that relies on preemptive attack nor a continuation of US diplomatic policy, vis a vis a failed negotiating strategy, combined with a lack of understanding of human nature, is the solution either. The US must incorporate some degree of "real-politick" to offset the moral high-ground negotiations baggage that often contributes more to creating problems than solutions. Now is the time for a level of strategic vision and enlightened leadership that demonstrates the pragmatic talents required by the world's greatest power, if it is to achieve a Pax Americana and realize its central role in ensuring peace, stability, and prosperity for the world.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> I chose, when referring to the US, to use the term “one of the most powerful nations in the world” vice the “sole superpower” for the simple reason that to be put on the horns of a dilemma by an economically failed state, arguable disqualifies one as a sole superpower.

<sup>2</sup> James T. Laney and Jason T. Shaplen, How to Deal With North Korea,” *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2003; [database on-line]; available from Colombia International Affairs Online; accessed 18 September 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Chuck Downs, *Over the Line: North Korea’s Negotiating Strategy* (Washington D.C.: AEI Press, 1999), 213.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 243-244. The agreement was considered significant for several reasons; instead of relying on a simple good faith approach, it offered incentives to the North Koreans based on verifiable “performance;” it included phased milestones; and was to be implemented through international consensus. In exchange for heavy fuel oil, non-weapons grade light water reactors (LWR), and improved relations with the US, North Korea would abandon its weapons grade nuclear reactor program.

<sup>6</sup> Ralph A. Cossa, “The U.S.-DPK Agreed Framework: Is it Still Viable? Is it Enough?,” *The PacNet Newsletter*, 9 July 1999; [database on-line]; available from Colombia International Affairs Online; accessed 23 September 2003.

<sup>7</sup> Downs, 276. My research reveals the exact reasons for NK pulling out of the Agreed Framework are unknown. Downs suggests in pages 274-277 that NK cited a lack of commitment by the US in meeting timelines for the supplying of agreed support. Those more cynical of North Korean motives claim that the Agreed Framework no longer met North Korea’s needs and their actions simply fit their standard modus operandi of creating a crisis to generate more concessions.

<sup>8</sup> Laney.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Michael O’Hanlon and Mike Mochizuki, *Crisis on the Korean Peninsula: How to Deal With a Nuclear North Korea* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003), 32.

<sup>12</sup> Michael O’Hanlon, “Think Bigger On North Korea,” *The Washington Post*, 17 September 2003, sec. A, p. 27 (1032 words) [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; accessed 18 September 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., “*Think Bigger On North Korea.*”

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., “*Think Bigger On North Korea.*”

<sup>15</sup> "Tactics for North Korea," *The Washington Post*, 27 August 2003, sec. A, p. 24 (593 words) [database on-line]; available from ProQuest; accessed 18 September 2003.

<sup>16</sup> George W. Bush, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, (Washington, D.C.: The White House, September 2002), 14.

<sup>17</sup> Vital interests are defined as those interests that if unfulfilled, will have immediate consequences for core national interests. Important interests are defined as those interests that if unfulfilled, will result in damage that will eventually affect core national interests. Peripheral interests are defined as those interests that if unfulfilled, will result in damage that is unlikely to affect core national interests.

<sup>18</sup> Donald H. Rumsfeld, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 30 Sept 2001), 2.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 2. A 1999 report by the North Korean advisory Group relates that NK possesses the nuclear warhead capable 3 stage Taepodong missile with a 3000 mile range that can reach the US homeland. A nuclear weapons capable NK that can threaten the security of US territories and the US homeland itself is a vital national interest. For more information on North Korean missile capabilities see: North Korea Advisory Group, *Report to the Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives, November 1999*; available from <<http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/dprk/ag-report.htm>>; Internet; accessed 11 January 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Ralph A. Cossa, "Prospects for the Six-Party Talks," *The PacNet Newsletter*, April 25, 2003; [database on-line]; available from Colombia International Affairs Online: accessed 16 January 2004.

<sup>21</sup> Bush, 26-27. A nuclear weapons capable NK that can threaten the security and well being of allies and friends in the East Asian littoral and the stability of global economic well being is probably a vital national interest, but is at a minimum, an important national interest. For more information on North Korean capabilities see: North Korea Advisory Group, *Report to the Speaker, U.S. House of Representatives, November 1999*; available from <<http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/dprk/ag-report.htm>>; Internet; accessed 11 January 2004.

<sup>22</sup> Marin Strmecki, "Bush's Approach to North Korea is Appropriate and Necessary," *The PacNet Newsletter 2002*, 27 February 2002, [database on-line]; available from Colombia International Affairs Online: accessed 16 January 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Bush, 1-2. Although the NSS does not specifically state the US goal is a democratic Korean peninsula it can be inferred from the language espousing US support for building the infrastructure of democracies around the world. Additionally, one could argue that to oppose a communist unified Korean peninsula is to support a democratic peninsula. In the end, given US efforts to increase its relations with communist China, to state publicly the goal of a reunified Korea under a democracy would only work against these efforts. At some point in time, when China makes further advances towards democracy, the administration will likely publicly state its goal of a reunified Korea under a democracy.

<sup>24</sup> Downs, 248.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 218.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 253.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 11. Downs offers the following ten observations about unique North Korean negotiating tactics that are essential to developing a counter strategy: "Setting preconditions for talks; creating incidents that redirect the attention of the negotiating parties; setting the stage to put its opponents on the defensive; loading the agenda with foregone conclusions; negotiating North Korean objectives first; perceiving concessions as a sign of weakness; introducing spurious issues as bargaining chips; reversing charges by claiming the other party committed the grievance; incorporating a North Korean veto on enforcement of agreements; [and] demanding renegotiation of previously negotiated provisions."

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 215-219.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 212-252.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 151-152.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>43</sup> C. Turner Joy, *How Communists Negotiate*, (Santa Monica: Fidelis Publishers, Inc, 1970), 175.

<sup>44</sup> Joe Strange, *Centers of Gravity & Critical Vulnerabilities: Building on the Clausewitzian Foundation So That We Can All Speak the Same Language*, Marine Corps University Series in Perspectives on Warfighting, no. 4 ( Quantico: Command and Staff College Foundation, 1996), 43. Dr. Strange's book contains an illuminating analysis of how centers of gravity, critical capabilities, critical requirements, and critical vulnerabilities are inter-related. The strategic center of gravity-critical capability-critical requirement-critical vulnerability analysis format and matrix developed by Dr. Joe Strange is used due to its clarity and thoroughness.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>46</sup> I worked diligently to follow Carl Von Clausewitz's dictum to trace the source of enemy strength to "the fewest possible sources, and ideally to one alone" but in the end I determine there were two strategic center's of gravity. See: Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 619. I determined that Kim Jung II is a strategic center of gravity because it is his skill and control that perpetuates the Korean crisis. His power, influence, and continued survival are amazing. His will, so similar to that of his father, Kim IL Sung, is the source of the regime's effective negotiating strategy. I also determined NK's possession of a nuclear weapons capability is the second strategic center of gravity. It is the nuclear weapons threat and the West's aversion to escalating a conflict into nuclear war that really gives strength to Kim Jung II. One could argue that by definition the nuclear weapons capability is really a critical capability, vice a center of gravity, because it directly supports Kim's role as the hub of all power. But, the situation is more complex than first analysis reveals. There is no question that Kim is very dangerous due to his skillful brinkmanship strategy. Even before the US belief that NK possessed nuclear weapons it was very wary of Kim, who frequently gained the upper hand during negotiations. But, NK's possession of nuclear weapons means that anyone who succeeds Kim will likely have access and control of the nuclear weapons as well.

<sup>47</sup> These courses of action are built on the assumption that NK will not be successful in fracturing the alliance between the US, South Korea, and Japan. Similarly, although the direct support of Russia and China in pursuing the chosen COA would be helpful, it is not essential. What is essential is they not oppose the adopted COA in a determined manner to undermine it. Therefore, it is also assumed, as difficult as it may be, the US will be successful in gaining the required support for the chosen COA from each of the key nations.

<sup>48</sup> Downs, 253-254.

<sup>49</sup> Hong Nack Kim, "U.S.-North Korean Relations Under the Bush Administration: Problems and Prospects," *Korea and World Affairs* 1 (Spring 2003): 42.

<sup>50</sup> Downs, 255.

<sup>51</sup> The balanced coercion strategy acknowledges that there is merit to the notion that communist regimes will one-day collapse of their own accord. When NK eliminates its nuclear weapons capability it will be rewarded with diplomatic recognition and a wide variety of aid in the forms of investments and loans. North Korea's return to the international community and the continued positive influences of democracy and globalization will erode the underpinnings of communism and set the conditions for NK to achieve the "soft-landing" desired by all the participants.

<sup>52</sup> There are numerous examples of NK's change in attitude when the US put pressure on the regime. Admiral Turner Joy relates the effect of the renewed United Nation's offensive in the summer of 1951 in driving the North Koreans back to the negotiating table with a significantly more accommodating attitude. Increased US military posture as a result of the Panmunjom axe murders resulted in significant behavioral changes by NK. The US Senate's resolution, passed 93 to 3 in June 1994, urging the President of the US to prepare US troops for war likely led to NK signing the Agreed Framework.

<sup>53</sup> It is likely the South Korean's will not be supportive of any kind of military response to NK. The US will have to make its case why a balanced coercion strategy is preferable to one that allows NK to continue to pursue its nuclear ambitions—which threatens US and regional security—or a strategy based on a high risk preemptive first strike with the attendant “hard landing” South Korea is loath to endure.

<sup>54</sup> It is recognized without Japanese and more importantly South Korean support there is no chance of COA 3 being implemented. If this COA is chosen by the US then the US must convince Japan and South Korea that this COA is preferable to the consequences of a US retaliatory nuclear strike against NK should they be linked to a nuclear detonation in the US. In other words, Japan and South Korea must be made to understand that COA 3 is designed to reduce danger on the peninsula. However, should it fail, they are safer with a US initiated attack to destroy the regime than a US nuclear retaliatory strike.

<sup>55</sup> David E. Kang, “International Relations Theory and the Second Korean War,” *International Studies Quarterly*, 47 (September 2003): 307-309. In this article, Kang states most of NK’s tanks were designed in the 1950s and its aircraft were designed before 1956. This antiquated equipment would be no match against state of the art US military equipment.

<sup>56</sup> The regime is aware the US military crushed an Iraqi Army similarly equipped to NK. The US must be willing to increase its military strength in Korea with combat troops, Carrier Battle Groups, Expeditionary Strike Groups, Marine Expeditionary Brigades, and US Air Force Expeditionary Wings as required to aggressively coerce NK into compliance with US provisions.

<sup>57</sup> China does not desire a sudden collapse of North Korea due to the economic/security implications for its southern regions. China has demonstrated its security concerns regarding a nuclear equipped NK via its role in previous four/six party talks. China is also expanding its role as an international player and is connected to the global economy. Although China could gain advantage by the US getting bogged down and overly focused on NK they do not gain from a US preemptive strike on NK or the resulting democratic reunification of the peninsula. Russia would probably lose from a destabilized global economy or a destroyed NK regime as it continues to search for economic markets.

<sup>58</sup> The North Korean regime has shown remarkable tenacity in pursuing its courses of action due to its confidence in its negotiating prowess. As was discussed in the section on North Korean negotiating strategy, the regime has the psychological edge when it comes to negotiations. The US consistently gets out maneuvered and therefore must change its strategy if it is to change the current negotiating paradigm.

<sup>59</sup> The credible use of military force must be used whenever NK attempts brinkmanship tactics or fails to comply with previous agreements. Any compromise of this counter-brinkmanship strategy will undermine all US negotiating efforts.

<sup>60</sup> Laney.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.



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